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Testimony - Labor & Public Employees Committee
RB 6534 An Act Concerning Labor Union Authorization Card Checks

Connecticut Water is a privately-owned water utility, serving nearly 90,000 customers or a population of approximately 300,000 in 54 towns throughout Connecticut. We employ approximately 225 people and are proud of our long record of customer service, regulatory compliance and environmental stewardship. We value our employees and provide them with competitive wages and benefits and a safe, comfortable workplace while balancing our financial responsibilities to our ratepayers/customers as a regulated utility.

Utility operations are complex and highly regulated so it is important to be able to attract and retain qualified employees. Our employees provide a critical service for public health and safety, delivering a product that is ingested daily by our customers.

We are not currently unionized, despite an effort by the Operating Engineers to organize in 2005. This overture by the union in 2005, which garnered a fair number of signatures, but failed in a vote, was the first indication we had of the nature and extent of some of our employees' issues. That experience had a huge impact on our organization and resulted in a number of positive changes, including improvements in internal communications and more open dialogue with employees.

We strongly oppose the changes in RB 6534 that would allow the mere signing of cards to trigger the authorization of the union. A number of our employees indicated they felt pressured to sign the cards and were grateful to have had the opportunity to vote by secret ballot for what they ultimately felt was best for them and their families. Moreover, they did not feel they had sufficient information at the time they were asked to sign the cards to truly judge their interest in a union and were more able to make an informed decision as the process evolved. Many did, however, indicate that they felt uncomfortable in declining to sign the cards, given the public nature of that process and the perceptions of their peers.

There are a number of protections that ensure that once cards are signed, employers will not interfere with the process or take retaliatory actions against any union supporters. Given those protections, it seems appropriate to maintain the current process that protects employees' rights to make such an important, highly personal decision through a secret ballot – and preserves the fundamental voting rights we all enjoy and that are a cornerstone of our democracy.

We recognize there may be changes in the federal law regarding this process and suggest that doing something at the state level may be premature and could conflict with those changes. **We respectfully request that the Committee reject RB 6534.**